Creative Learning across the Barbican-Guildhall Campus

A new paradigm for engaging with the arts?

Sean Gregory and Peter Renshaw
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This paper describes a major research project linking an institution of Higher Education (Guildhall School of Music & Drama) and a commercial arts centre (Barbican). The project is called Creative Learning. The paper starts by setting out the two main research aims of the project and describes the practice-based working methods through which these aims are achieved. The pedagogic underpinning of the approaches used in the various performances, workshops and other events that constitute the practice-based elements of Creative Learning is then analysed in detail. This analysis draws on three main events as examples of Creative Learning in action. The paper goes on to evaluate the overall project’s achievements so far, and sets out probable key directions for the future. The paper ends by reflecting on the significance of the research for the development of the artistic landscape of the future.

The Barbican and Guildhall School’s Creative Learning division constitutes an active and radical alliance for artistic innovation, learning and research. A primary imperative for Creative Learning is to challenge assumptions about the role of the artist in society, interrogating the most appropriate and effective approaches to provide a coherent, flexible and sustainable professional development framework for the 21st century artist. Creative Learning aims to contribute to the broadening of HE provision, developing a translatable and fully reflexive model of a ‘golden thread’ of learning in the arts, covering under-18, undergraduate, postgraduate and professional development for multi-arts practitioners working in creative, collaborative and participatory settings.

The work of Creative Learning is characterised by creative, collaborative artistic practice which:

- Seeks to engage with specific cultures and communities in a creative and improvisational manner
- Is concerned with non-hierarchical and participatory processes
- Engenders a critical and self-reflexive relationship to its practices
- Aims to enable risk-taking, discovery and invention; recognising, creating or exploring new knowledge to generate new ideas or concepts.

**Context**

Since 2009, when the Creative Learning division was formed, an evolution has begun which fundamentally tests the notions of what an arts centre and a conservatoire can achieve through different ways of working together; boundaries are being pushed and a new landscape of collaboration is emerging. Increasingly artists, teachers and audiences are seeking to engage in cross-arts, cross-cultural and cross-sector collaborations. This exploration into new territory brings with it a sense of adventure and adds another dimension to artistic and cultural engagement.

Right from its inception, Creative Learning at Barbican-Guildhall was never seen as peripheral to the artistic thrust of the organisation. Its work is now viewed as ‘learning and engagement’, and there is clear evidence that when linked to the core artistic programme it has the potential to create new forms of performance, participation and audience development.

Historically, both the Barbican and Guildhall School learning and participation programmes have been constrained in their ambition to work more collaboratively across the arts. They have tended to lack diversity in those that take part. They have not always embraced the knowledge/best practice of partners and have been limited in their connection to the Barbican’s
arts programme. This common organisational divide perhaps reflects in microcosm the gaps that can exist between the professional arts and learning sectors.

Creative Learning was conceived out of both:

- A 25-year body of professional development work in creative music-making at the Guildhall School whose ethos questioned traditional pedagogical structures and methods through both formal/non-formal educational settings;
- A 10-year body of learning and participation activity through Barbican Education, working alongside the Centre’s art form departments.

At the heart of the new Creative Learning strategy is the concept of ‘a golden thread’ that provides a flexible and dynamic life-long learning continuum for audiences and artists, from the first point of access through to professional practitioner training. It aims to establish learning pathways across all art forms, styles and genres, with multiple entry and exit points for all.

Continuing this trajectory, a key aim of Creative Learning is to create and offer expertise, infrastructure and learning pathways that are radical and that reflect the reality of our world today and the needs of contemporary society. The very positioning of the division across the Barbican-Guildhall Campus offers an opportunity to combine resources (artistic, educational, physical) in new ways. Equally, the work of Creative Learning extends far beyond the walls of the Barbican-Guildhall Campus. Our research encompasses a symbiotic relationship between participants of all ages, backgrounds and abilities and artists/leaders whose practice covers a range of contexts across all art forms.

The dual aims of this on-going research are:

- To develop understanding and to quantify the value of engaging with the arts in today’s society through the various modes of creative learning;
- To research how we best provide a dynamic and accessible environment that engenders and supports this learning at all levels and ages.

The translatability of Creative Learning’s work is central to its contribution to the broadening of HE provision, the development of a fully reflexive model and the establishment of a ‘golden thread’ of learning in the arts, covering under 18, undergraduate, postgraduate and professional development for multi-arts practitioners working in creative, collaborative and participatory settings.

There are some key areas that are being taken into consideration, which include:

- Social, cultural and artistic context – researching and questioning strategy, activity, learning and artistic aims in relation to these.
- How best to use existing research methods to enhance our understanding of our work and how best to integrate this into our teaching/learning models?
- Interrogating the relationship between the shape of a project or event and the artistic and learning aims (through reflective/reflexive thinking, discussion and debate, evaluation, etc).
- Exploring the benefits of providing flexible, ‘porous’ projects and pathways that include multi-layered learning between all participants at all stages of learning.
• How best to engender and harness reflective practice as a core aspect of our artistic and organisational ethos?
• What teaching/learning models and frameworks are most effective in this environment?
• How do we best define the artistic skills and portfolio competencies gained for artists training in preparation for today’s society?
• What are the frameworks (process and outcome based) that we use to evaluate or assess the value and quality of the work that is done?
• How does the level of provision of technical and physical resources impact on this work?
• What are the most effective ways of documenting and disseminating Creative Learning’s impact through quantitative/qualitative research and evaluation?

This article begins by examining the conceptual frame underpinning Creative Learning – to make explicit its underlying principles and to explore the learning processes that are central to its philosophy of practice. It then goes on to describe a series of projects and activities, illustrating how the two research aims have been explored in a variety of contexts.

The conceptual frame underpinning Creative Learning at Barbican-Guildhall

What, then, are the modes of learning that constitute the core of the work of Creative Learning at Barbican-Guildhall? What characterises the main elements of the learning and engagement and how far are they interconnected within various artistic and educational contexts? The following five forms of learning stand out as central to the work and development of Barbican-Guildhall:

• Creative learning (i.e., creative approaches to thinking and doing)
• Collaborative learning (i.e., working together)
• Cross-arts learning (i.e., working together across art forms)
• Experiential learning (i.e., learning by discovery)
• Reflective learning (i.e., reflecting on artistic practice and on personal and professional development).

Each will be examined and their resonance illustrated by drawing on recent arts projects led by Creative Learning practitioners. Special attention will be given to three key initiatives: Disruption, Future Band and Unleashed.
Creative learning

The notion of creativity underlying the work of the Creative Learning team rests on principles similar to those adopted by Graham Jeffery (2005) at Newham Sixth Form College (NewVIc) in a major action research project funded by the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA). Creativity is seen as:

- A **critical and social** process, founded in social relations. We do not define creativity as an isolated and individual ‘act of genius’ but as **rooted in interaction** – the notion of the **creative milieu** is important here (Landry, 2000): the need for places where relationships can be formed, connections can be made, collaborations can occur and resources can be obtained.

The task for artists and teachers is:

- To develop a microclimate where creativity might flourish – (that is) **building a learning culture** so that students and participants are enabled to access resources, exercise critical judgement, undertake experiments and construct novel ideas, collaborate to problem-solve and produce work that is **of value to them and to the wider communities in which they are located**. (Jeffery, 2005, p.6)

These principles capture some of the key threads in many debates about creativity that led up to the publication of *All Our Futures*, the report of the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCC, 1999). They are also reinforced by Ken Robinson (2001), Chair of the NACCC, in his book *Out of Our Minds: Learning to be Creative*, where he stresses that creativity flourishes best in an environment in which dialogue and interaction are integral to a culture of collaboration.

- **Creativity is not a purely personal process.** Many creative processes draw from the ideas and stimulation of other people. Creativity flourishes in an atmosphere where original thinking and innovation are encouraged and stimulated. It fades where dialogue and interaction are stifled.

- **Creativity is a dynamic process and can involve many different areas of expertise.** [...] New ideas often come from the dialogue between different disciplines, through which specialists in different fields make their ideas available to each other and create the opportunity for new interpretations and applications. A culture of creativity will promote openness between specialists, and departments will have real opportunities for creative encounters. (Robinson, 2001, pp.181–2)

The power of collaboration in fostering creativity and innovation was reiterated by Peter Renshaw (2011) in his enquiry into creative collaborative learning across the Barbican-Guildhall Campus. Much of the evidence drawn from interviews with artists and management, and supported by case studies and personal testimonies, demonstrated the belief that a culture that respects dialogue and shared critical reflection is likely to encourage the process of making interconnections, of cross-fertilisation of ideas and practices, of exploring collaborative ways of learning in order to create something new and valuable. As Renshaw points out:

This is not achieved in isolation, in a silo of convention and predictability, but by people choosing to work together, celebrating how their different talents, perspectives and insights can create something that transforms their practice and their ways of seeing the world. (Renshaw, 2011, p.18)
The creative process, then, is strengthened and enriched by engaging in collaborative ways of working and learning – a point also made by Ken Robinson (2009) in his book, The Element, where he states that “creativity draws not just from our own personal resources but also from the wider world of other people’s ideas and values” (p.80).

In her extensive research Anna Craft (e.g. 2000; 2001; 2005) sees creativity as something much broader than the imaginative activity defined by the NACCC (1999), where creativity is perceived as “imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value” (p.29). Craft (2000) introduces the notion of ‘little c creativity’ as distinct from the ‘high’ creativity of the genius, but most importantly she explores the dynamic connection between what she calls ‘possibility thinking’ and creativity (p.3). She sees ‘possibility thinking’ – the ability to see, grasp and explore possibilities – as the ‘engine’ of creativity; the motor that drives the creative process:

The word creativity seems to describe flux, change, development, growth; the approach to life which begins with: ‘what if’ … or ‘perhaps if’ … One way of describing creativity is that its core is one of questioning … or that possibility thinking is the ‘engine’ of creativity. (Craft, 2000, p.7)

Craft adds that possibility thinking also involves the skills of problem solving and problem finding:

Being able to identify a question, a topic for investigation, a puzzle to explore, trying out new options, all involve ‘finding’ or ‘identifying’ a problem, that is ‘other possibilities’. (ibid., p.8)

It is clear that creative learning entails developing the key skills identified by Craft in her analysis of possibility thinking. For example, being imaginative; being aware of the unconventionality of what one is doing and thinking; being original and departing from what is the norm; being curious and asking questions that lead to new ways of thinking; engaging in play as a way of exploring and opening up possibilities (ibid., pp.3-6). These skills are best developed in an environment – a creative milieu – that values collaborative forms of learning and encourages people to challenge and extend established boundaries.

**Collaborative learning**

There is a close link then between creative learning and collaboration – between the creative process and making connections through different forms of ‘conversation’. As mentioned previously, creative learning and innovation best flourish in a culture of collaboration with its twin planks of interaction and dialogue in which finely tuned listening is a critical component. But as Richard Sennett (2012) points out in his book, Together, “listening carefully produces conversations of two sorts, the dialectic and the dialogic” (p.18), both of which are equally valid depending on the particular context.

Within a dialectic conversation the ‘verbal play of opposites’ works towards achieving a synthesis – a common understanding or common ground. In his book on conversation Theodore Zeldin (1998) supports this interpretation of a dialectic conversation but adds that “the good listener (also) detects common ground more in what another person assumes than says” (p.87). That is by searching for a common understanding through connecting to both the intention and to the context, especially through making explicit any assumptions and preconceptions underlying the body of the conversation.
But the kind of conversation that is fundamental to collaborative learning is better seen as ‘dialogic’. That is, one that is not primarily seeking resolution through finding common ground or shared agreement, but one in which the process of exchange enables people to become more aware of their own views, values and preconceptions together with expanding their understanding of one another (Sennett, 2012, p.19). As in the case of dialectic conversation, any collaboration entails the participants having to pay attention to what each person might be implying but not actually saying. On the other hand, an important aspect of dialogic conversation is that the exploration of misunderstandings between people can help to clarify and strengthen mutual understanding. In addition, Sennett observes that within the context of a dialogic conversation:

the heart of all listening skills […] lies in picking up on concrete details, on specifics, to drive the conversation forward. Bad listeners bounce back in generalities when they respond; they’re not attending to those small phrases, facial gestures or silences which open up discussion. (ibid., p.20)

Sennett then draws attention to a crucial issue in any dialogic conversation – the primacy of empathy rather than sympathy when people are working in collaboration. Trying to identify too strongly with the other person through using sympathy can undermine the integrity of a dialogic conversation, especially in a professional context. Sennett describes this distinction pithily:

Both sympathy and empathy convey recognition, and both forge a bond, but the one is an embrace, the other an encounter. Sympathy overcomes differences through imaginative acts of identification; empathy attends to another person on his or her own terms. Sympathy has usually been thought a stronger sentiment than empathy, because ‘I feel your pain’ puts the stress on what I feel; it activates one’s own ego. Empathy is a more demanding exercise, at least in listening; the listener has to get outside him- or herself. (ibid., p.21)

Empathy, then, is a central feature of the kind of reflective or dialogic conversation that is critical when people are working together in different contexts.

Just as dialogue is the lifeblood of collaboration, creative learning thrives best in a culture of collaboration. This connection between creative learning and collaboration has been examined in depth by Keith Sawyer, a psychologist who has studied the ways in which jazz bands and improvisational theatre companies use different collaborative approaches to harness the collective creative energy of the group (see Sawyer, 1999, 2005 and 2007). For Sawyer, the interconnectedness, the shared vision, that lies at the heart of a collaborative conversation (as in any musical or verbal improvisation), generates unpredictable outcomes that stimulate the participants to see themselves, their colleagues and the world differently. The power of collaboration, the complementarity embedded in the collaborative process, becomes the driver for creativity and innovation.

When a group is improvising together, the unpredictability of each participant’s performance also implies that the performance will be collaborative. Since each performer cannot know what the other performers will do, each has to listen and respond to the others, resulting in a collaborative, and inter-subjectively generated, performance. In these group improvisations – including small-group jazz, ‘improv.’ theatre, and everyday conversation – no one acts as the director or leader, determining where the performance will go; instead, the performance emerges out of the actions of everyone working together. This is why many jazz musicians refer to musical improvisation as a conversation. (Sawyer, 1999, p.194)
The dynamics of the group, the flow of energy emerging within the group, the interaction between members of the group, the active listening within the group, the shared trust within the group – all are essential elements in effective collaborative learning. In a later article Sawyer (2005) observes the importance of communication and interaction within any group activity.

In group performance, the creativity of the performance depends on an intangible chemistry between the members of the group. In jazz, for example, no single musician can determine the flow of the performance. It emerges out of the musical conversation, a give-and-take as performers propose new ideas, respond to others’ ideas, and elaborate or modify those ideas as the performance moves forward. (p.47)

It is through this interaction, with its unique chemistry, that creative ideas and leaps of imagination begin to fly. Creative challenges emerge from the group responding to the unexpected. Nothing will ever seem quite the same again.

Vera John-Steiner (2006) in her comprehensive work, *Creative Collaboration*, reiterates this point by emphasising the importance of the psychological dynamics of collaboration in which human possibilities and ideas are stretched and extended when people engage in creative processes together. She considers that this kind of ‘integrative collaboration’ has the potential of transforming ways of seeing and modes of thought to create a completely new vision (p.203). New knowledge is ‘co-constructed’ through dialogue, risk-taking and shared exploration of ideas and meaning within the group. This is the nub of creative collaborative learning, with ‘conversation’ being the motor driving the creative collaborative process.

For John-Steiner (2006) integrative collaboration is critical as it transforms both the field of activity and the participants who are working together. By challenging habitual patterns of learning and working, by extending what they know, by drawing on different perspectives, collaboration can enable the group to construct a creative synthesis leading to a new paradigm in art or science (pp.65, 70 and 96). This is the ultimate in creative learning.

Much attention has been given to the ‘magical chemistry’ that happens when a group is suddenly transformed by something seemingly intangible during a creative collaborative process. For example, Keith Sawyer, with his passion for jazz, began to explore the nature of this ‘intangible chemistry’ when he was working at the University of Chicago with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 2003), who coined the term ‘flow’ to describe a particular state of heightened consciousness.

[Csikszentmihalyi] discovered that extremely creative people are at their peak when they experience ‘a unified flowing from one moment to the next, in which we feel in control of our actions, and in which there is little distinction between self and environment, between stimulus and response, or between past, present, and future’. (Sawyer, 2007, p.42)

With his interest in the connection between improvised conversation, flow and creativity, Sawyer was curious to know how flow functions in group processes. “Does the group itself enter a flow state? Might there be something like ‘group flow’? And what happens when everything comes together to help a group to be in flow?” (ibid., p.43). Through his research into jazz ensembles Sawyer found that improvising groups, when performing at the height of their ability, attain a collective state of mind, a peak experience, that he called ‘group flow’. Most importantly, he observed that a subtle balance be maintained between this group flow and structure within a creative improvisatory process.

Group flow happens when many tensions are in perfect balance: the tension between convention and novelty; between structure and improvisation; between the critical, analytic mind and the freewheeling, outside-the-box mind;
between listening to the rest of the group and speaking out in individual voices. The paradox of improvisation is that it can happen only when there are rules and the players share tacit understandings, but with too many rules or too much cohesion, the potential for innovation is lost. The key question facing groups that have to innovate is finding just the right amount of structure to support improvisation, but not so much that it smothers creativity.

(ibid., p.56)

The personal and group challenges arising from the flow of creative collaborative learning can be energising and inspiring, but they can also be quite daunting. Living ‘on the edge’, constantly taking risks, responding to the unpredictable, coming to understand one’s own preconceptions, drawing on one’s creative resources yet always listening to the voice of others – these finely tuned skills and states of being lie at the heart of any creative conversational process. But if they are to be allowed to flow and to flower, this can only take place in an emotionally supportive and understanding environment – in a creative milieu that can help to choreograph the many interconnected conversations that are the bedrock of collaboration.

Cross-arts learning

One of the main thrusts of the Creative Learning division reflects the different disciplines and art forms that constitute the backbone of the artistic and educational life of the Barbican-Guildhall. Music, theatre, dance, visual arts, cinema, literature and digital technology regularly come together in different collaborations to make cross-arts learning a living reality. Artists are encouraged to engage in a cross-arts rather than a multi-arts approach to participative collaboration so that art forms are interacting with each other rather than just working in parallel.

In its Creative Learning Strategy the Barbican-Guildhall (2010) makes explicit how a growing number of artists are responding to the changing cultural landscape and seeking new ways of collaborating and creating work. It observes that “contemporary arts practitioners are increasingly creating meaning by combining, ‘mashing up’ and mixing creative sources” (p.4). It adds that:

The 21st Century has brought an era of ‘non-definability’ – culturally, artistically, socially – providing opportunity for the worlds of digital technology, multi-media installations, DJs and so on, alongside traditionally-trained performing and visual arts practitioners, to create new hybrids of performance and communication. (p.4)

One major example of cross-arts collaboration can be seen in Shift which forms part of a strategic Special Initiative, ‘ArtWorks: Developing Practice in Participatory Settings’, set up by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation (2011). In the introduction to the Shift proposal Sean Gregory captures the potential of what might flow from different forms of collaborative practice, especially those that bring together different artistic, cultural and social perspectives.

The Shift Programme proposes the creation of an innovative community of arts practitioners capable of working across artistic disciplines and social contexts. The community will be skilled as leaders, collaborators, performers and teachers. Their participatory practice will influence the way in which art is made. They will inspire and influence other practitioners and pass on their knowledge to the wider world so multiplying the impact of their work. (Gregory, 2011, p.4)
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As is reflected in *Shift*, existing norms are now being challenged. Art forms are morphing and combining, and boundaries are becoming porous – between disciplines, styles, genres and between learning and artistic practice. Gregory indicates the way in which this growing philosophy might impact on the work of Barbican-Guildhall.

Central to current thinking is the consideration as to how the ‘stitches’ holding the artistic programme and creative learning together might eventually ‘dissolve’ so as to think, plan and implement ‘as one’. Critical to this is the melding of the artistic programme with the creation of exciting and radical original work that may come from new collaborations. (ibid., p.12)

One example of a well-established cross-arts collaboration at Barbican-Guildhall is described by Nell Catchpole, the artistic leader of MAP/Making, in the *Shift* proposal.

MAP/Making brings together instrumentalists and composers from the Guildhall School and visual artists from the Royal College of Art working in the fields of audio-visual, video and light projection, sound and multimedia. An ambitious and ground-breaking project, MAP/Making has enabled students from the two institutions to tackle completely new art forms, acquiring new expertise in the role of visual and audio technology within live performance, and has enhanced communication between the artists involved. It has opened up new career paths for a number of the participants and led to the creation of several dynamic cross-arts companies such as FILTER, Cipher and music2communicate, which are already proving commercially successful.

As part of the work of Creative Learning, future MAP/Making projects have the potential to respond to the opportunities that arise from being part of the Barbican’s artistic programme: for example, the use of venues across the Campus, collaborations with internationally-renowned artists programmed by the Barbican and collaborations across all art forms and within a broader range of contexts.

Through *Shift*, the vision for MAP/Making is for it to move beyond being an annual project for postgraduate Guildhall and RCA students and to establish a community of practitioners extending from emerging professionals and project leaders through to young professionals who have taken part in past projects and to new students and learners of all ages. MAP/Making will therefore extend beyond the worlds of the academic institutions, becoming a widely-recognised incubator for cutting-edge collaborative artistic practice. (Gregory, 2011, p.16)

In an interview with Sean Gregory for an enquiry into creative collaborative learning across the Barbican-Guildhall Campus, he commented that “for over ten years the MAP/Making collaboration has manifested itself in many different ways, but especially in how people perform and communicate ideas: whether through established repertoire or through newly created work, through staged performance or an installation; or through a theme or topic that is non-arts related, aiming at a balance between the concept and how the actual idea is explored and developed” (Renshaw, 2011, p.45).

These kinds of cross-arts collaborations are the bread and butter of many artists and teachers, who feel they can only make sense of the contemporary cultural world through working together with creative practitioners from different disciplines. On the other hand, there are many people who quite understandably feel threatened by this growing move towards more interconnected ways of working. Each art form, each arts organisation has its own history, its own practice, against which each person defines who they are, both collectively and individually. Their sense of self, their identity is rooted in how they engage, and have engaged over many years, with their particular art form and professional colleagues in what is referred to as a ‘community of practice’ (see Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). That is, we perceive who we are in relation to a form of life and network of relationships that give us a sense of purpose, meaning, values and a framework with which to judge the quality of our engagement.
This shift towards collaboration and shared creative processes across disciplines constitutes a challenge, both to the individual and to the organisation, because it encourages practitioners, producers, management, students and teachers to redefine who they are and what they do in terms of a new paradigm – one which is characterised by developing shared forms of learning and shared approaches to fostering creativity that necessitate a sharing of trust, vulnerability, responsibility and leadership. The collective creative energy at the heart of cross-arts practice, or any form of collaborative practice for that matter, opens up new connections and new possibilities. It generates new ideas, extends our ways of perceiving and understanding that can lead to new forms of making and performing art. Therefore it inevitably challenges teachers to explore new modes of teaching and learning, and deepens understanding of the relationship between artists and their audiences. Creative collaborative learning, then, plays a critical role in responding and readjusting to this new paradigm.

In a vision statement prepared for the Guildhall School in 2001, the need to adopt a broader perspective towards culture and the arts through developing new partnerships, networks and interconnections was seen as a vital way forwards if the organisation was to respond creatively to the changing landscape (see Renshaw, 2001, pp.9–11). It was suggested that making connections lies at the heart of any arts organisation’s response to change – for example, cultural connections; trans-cultural connections; cross-genre connections within music; connections within the School; professional connections; connections with education and the wider community; and global connections. Not surprisingly, cross-arts connections were also stressed with the intention of:

encouraging cross-fertilisation between the creative arts, technology and multi-media with the aim of developing an artistic language which relates to wider audiences;

• Identifying the common ground between arts disciplines;
• Stimulating work that extends boundaries and fosters innovation at ‘the cracks between the floorboards’;
• Developing more diverse artistic programmes by strengthening opportunities for cross-arts work. (ibid., p.9)

In recent years there has been a marked shift in attitude towards more interconnected forms of working in the Guildhall School, and this has been further strengthened by its growing relationship with the Barbican, in which Creative Learning acts as a buckle between both organisations. It is hardly surprising that cross-arts work is growing in this nurturing environment.
Experiential learning

Integral to the work of Creative Learning are the two closely related processes of experiential learning and reflective learning, both of which often include such modes of learning as action learning, situated learning, work-based learning, problem-based learning, collaborative learning, transformative learning, learning through self-assessment, learning through reflective conversation, learning within communities of practice, and reflexive learning and tacit knowledge (see Tavistock Institute, 2002).

As Renshaw (2006) observes in his exploration of the place of mentoring in lifelong learning for musicians:

All these processes constitute an approach to individual and collective learning that generates a strong form of engagement and understanding as the learning arises from and is connected to the context and experience of the participants. (p.9)

Much of the early thinking about experiential learning goes back to John Dewey (1859–1952). In his seminal work Democracy and Education, Dewey (1916) extols the strengths of learning through experience and reflection in experience. He bluntly asserts that “an ounce of experience is better than a ton of theory simply because it is only in experience that any theory has vital and verifiable significance” (Chapter 11, p.5). Expanding on this view Dewey claims that:

An experience […] is capable of generating and carrying any amount of theory (or intellectual content), but a theory apart from an experience cannot be definitely grasped even as theory. It tends to become a mere verbal formula, a set of catchwords used to render thinking, or genuine theorising, as unnecessary and impossible. (ibid.)

In his later work, Education and Experience, Dewey (1938) comments on the nature of experiential learning within a reflective context:

The method of intelligence manifested in the experimental method demands keeping track of ideas, activities and observed consequences. Keeping track is a matter of reflective review and summarising, in which there is both discrimination and record of the significant features of a developing experience. To reflect is to look back over what has been done so as to extract the net meanings which are the capital stock for intelligent dealing with further experiences. (p.87)

Reflection, then, is critical to Dewey’s view of learning as a “continuous process of reconstruction of experience” (ibid.).

Building on the work of Dewey, Carl Rogers (1961, 1969) adopted a holistic approach to learning that was highly influential in the fields of education, counselling and psychotherapy. For Rogers experiential learning, with its commitment to person-centred learning, self-initiated learning and student self-evaluation, was the most effective way of addressing the needs and interests of the learner, leading to personal change and development. By emphasising the principle of ‘learning to learn’ and the importance of being open to change, Rogers considered that learning is best facilitated when:

• The student participates completely in the learning process and has control over its nature and direction
• It is based on practical, social, personal or research problems of interest to the learner
• Self-evaluation is the principal method of assessing progress (See Briner, 1999, p.2)
A key element in experiential learning is that “learners analyse their experience by reflecting, evaluating and reconstructing it [...] in order to draw meaning from it in the light of prior experience. This review of their experience may lead to further action” (Andresen, Boud and Cohen, 2000, p.1). The reciprocal relationship between action and reflection was examined by David Kolb (1984) in his foundational work on modern experiential education theory. His experiential learning cycle, based on a continuous spiral of learning, comprised: concrete experience – observation and reflection – forming abstract concepts – testing in new situations (see Smith, 2001, pp.2–3). For Kolb (1984, p.27) “knowledge is continuously derived from and tested out in the experience of the learner”. Kolb’s view of learning as a continuous process grounded in experience entails developing “a holistic, integrative perspective on learning that combines experience, perception, cognition and action” (Andresen, Boud and Cohen, 2000, p.6).

In their work, Boud, Cohen and Walker (1993) articulate the assumptions underlying experiential learning:

- Experience is the foundation of, and the stimulus for, learning
- Learners actively construct their own experience
- Learning is a holistic process
- Learning is socially and culturally constructed
- Learning is influenced by the socio-emotional context in which it occurs (cited in Andresen et al., 2000, p.1)

They also further clarify the central characteristics of experiential learning, acknowledging that it cannot be reduced to a set of strategies, methods, formulae or recipes – an important point in our current performance driven environment that favours packaging learning strategies into simplistic ‘toolkits’. The distinguishing features of experiential learning outlined by Andresen, Boud and Cohen (2000) comprise:

- Involvement of the whole person, including intellect, feelings and senses.
- Drawing on relevant individual learning experiences so that new learning can be more effectively integrated into a person’s understanding.
- Continued reflection upon earlier experiences in order to add to and transform them into deeper understanding.
- Intentionally designed learning through structured activities. For example, simulations, games, role play, visualisations, focus groups and socio-drama.
- Forms of facilitation (through teachers, leaders, coaches, mentors, therapists) that generally imply a relatively equal partnership between facilitator and learner, thus respecting the autonomy of the learner.
- Modes of assessment that are congruent with experientially-based learning processes. For example, self-assessment and peer assessment, using learning journals, personal diaries, reading logs, negotiated learning contracts and forms of presentation other than writing. (pp.1–2)

The key criteria that help to delineate experientially-based learning activities include:

- The learning is personally significant and meaningful, resulting in a strong sense of ownership.
- The primary focus is on deepening the learner’s personal engagement with what is being learnt.
- Critical reflection is central to the learning process.
• Learning involves the whole person, thus recognising the integral relationship between perceptions, awareness, sensibilities, values and cognitive forms of understanding.

• Recognition of what learners bring to the learning process.

• Valuing the self-directive potential of the learner entails teachers, trainers, leaders and facilitators demonstrating respect, trust, openness and concern for the well-being of the learner. (ibid., pp.2−3)

Current learning theories, although acknowledging the strength of experiential learning, are increasingly emphasising the significance of connecting individual and collective learning to the context in which it is taking place. A number of related context-based learning processes are now being used in the workplace and in approaches to lifelong learning, informal learning and to adult education: for example, in situated learning, work-based learning, transformative learning, action learning and reflective conversation in communities of practice.

Within these processes mentoring is often seen as an effective way of enabling individuals to engage more fully with the context in which they are working. The reflective approaches used in mentoring help to foster a deeper awareness of context and place thereby strengthening a person’s conviction and understanding of what they are doing. They provide opportunities for individuals to step outside their immediate situation and become detached spectators of their own practice and learning. Connecting to their context in this way helps to broaden people’s perspectives and invites them to ask fundamental questions about their motivation, purpose and future direction. For example:

• Why do I do what I do?

• How do I perceive my identity in the changing cultural landscape?

• In what ways does this impact on my professional life and work?

• What is my future direction?

• What determines my long-term goals and future priorities?

Reflective forms of mentoring are critical to facilitating this kind of questioning and reflection arising out of experience in particular contexts.

In its discussion of context-based learning, the Tavistock Institute report (2002) highlights the importance of situated learning, which is based on the notion that “the context in which learning takes place is an integral part of what is learned” (p.126). That is, the process of knowledge and skill acquisition is rooted in a communal or collaborative setting that helps to generate a shared sense of belonging and knowing within a particular context. Meaning is socially constructed within learning arising from active engagement in a ‘community of practice’ (see Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

The primary focus of Wenger’s theory is on ‘learning as social participation’ and it contains four interconnected elements:

• Meaning through learning as experience

• Practice through learning as doing

• Community through learning as belonging

• Identity through learning as becoming (Wenger, 1998, p.5)
The theoretical perspective developed by Lave and Wenger (1991) provides a foundation for understanding the fundamental principle of connecting to context in a practice of collaborative learning. Collaborative practice is rooted in a history of shared learning in which there is a coherent connection between knowing and learning, and between the ways in which knowledge is acquired, shared and developed. By positioning learning and knowing in the context of active participation in social communities, learners are far more likely to deepen their understanding, engagement and commitment to what they are doing. Moreover it is likely to transform their perception of themselves and of others.

This transformative kind of learning is central to the work of Jack Mezirow (1990; 1991), who argues that individual and social empowerment grows out of working in social contexts that encourage collaborative dialogue, critical reflection and participation in social action. In such cases Mezirow maintains that by reflecting critically on our assumptions and presuppositions individual learning can be transformed.

Perspective transformation is the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand and feel about our world; of reformulating these assumptions to permit a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable and integrative perspective; and of making decisions or otherwise acting on these new understandings. (Mezirow, 1990, p.14)

For effective transformative learning to take place, the leaders responsible for facilitating this dialogue – teachers, tutors, mentors – need to focus on enabling the learner:

- To question the assumptions that underlie their beliefs, feelings and actions
- To assess the likely consequences of their assumptions
- To identify and explore alternative assumptions
- To test the validity of these assumptions through participating in reflective dialogue

By engaging in this transformative process the learner has the opportunity of becoming more reflective and critically engaged, of being more open to different perspectives, of being less defensive and more receptive to new ideas (see Mezirow, 1991).

Action learning is another mode of learning that is rooted in experience but which also uses critical dialogue and reflective conversation for fostering development and change in the workplace. As indicated in the Tavistock Institute report (2002):

The process takes the form of a reflective conversation in which the practitioner, with the support of colleagues, draws on his or her experiences to understand the situation, attempt to frame the problem, suggest action, and then reinterpret the situation in light of the consequences of action. (p.100)

Examples of participative methods for continuous learning arising from action include: quality circles, focus groups, work group discussions and research corners in which new findings and issues are raised and analysed. If this approach to reflective practice is built into the culture of an organisation, it can become an effective means of generating change. The Tavistock Institute report emphasises that:

At the heart of these models based on action-reflection learning and learning from experience are new ways of thinking about feedback, questioning, talking, reflecting and making sense of experience – for individuals to learn but also for that learning to be shared with others in teams and used to make changes in the organisation. (ibid.)
However, these developing forms of learning place new demands and responsibilities on those institutions aiming at becoming ‘learning organisations’. The effectiveness of these approaches very much depends on the support given to all participants by such people as mentors, coaches, trainers, line managers and team leaders. Ideally, anyone in a position of responsibility has an obligation to create a learning environment that pays due attention to the support and development of the workforce.

The shift towards facilitating different approaches to learning within the workplace has opened up a debate that is focusing on a growing acknowledgement that “learning is also acquired through emotion, attitudes, communication and habit mediated through imitation of role models, the forging of meaningful relationships, experience and memory and developing a sense of self and values” (Tavistock Institute, 2002, p.103).

**Reflective learning**

In many ways reflective learning underpins the whole family of interrelated modes of learning that constitute the core of the work of the Creative Learning division. The quality of all learning processes, the quality of the wide variety of projects, performances, exhibitions, installations and presentations at Barbican-Guildhall is dependent in part on the depth, coherence and integrity of the critical reflection arising from each particular context. Moreover, it is fundamental to the development of all creative work if things are going to move forwards and adapt to change. Artistic practice, like any other form of professional practice, has to have a reflective and critical edge otherwise it will ossify and become stuck in well-worn formulae and recipes. On this analysis, formulaic-led creativity can only be seen as the negation of creativity.

In his seminal work on reflective practice, Donald Schön (1987) makes explicit the importance of nurturing and maintaining a reciprocal relationship between ‘reflection-on-action’ and ‘reflection-in-action’ (pp.26−31). That is, maintaining a balance between critical reflection and reflexive practice (see Renshaw, 2006, 23-9; Renshaw, 2010, pp.102-4; Smilde, 2009, 68-70).

‘Reflection-on-action’ entails adopting a critical perspective about the reasons and consequences of what we do in different contexts. By focusing on the why rather than the how, this process is central to the evaluation of what we do and helps to inform any subsequent action. Critical reflection enables us to transform our learning and changes the way we make sense of our experience, our world view, and our understanding of people and knowledge of ourselves. This approach becomes integral to our conception, planning, delivery and evaluation of any activity or project. It serves as the prism by which we review and appraise what we have been engaged in.

Integral to this view of critical reflection is the notion of ‘reflective intelligence’ developed by the Harvard psychologist, David Perkins (1995). Extending the work of Howard Gardner (1983) on multiple intelligences, Perkins claims that:

> Reflective intelligence derives from our capacity to take a mental step back and observe our own efforts to solve a problem or achieve a goal […] It effectively constitutes a control system, which can be greatly developed by learning, acting upon our thinking and doing. It involves critical self-review, the cultivation of dispositions which support intelligent behaviour, and the use of mental strategies to solve unfamiliar problems or get round obstacles […] Reflective intelligence gives us a bird’s eye view of our own learning, allowing us to question our own approach to a situation, helping us to cope with novelty and to be aware of our own natural biases of thought and action (see Bentley, 1998, p.27).
Tom Bentley, former Director of the think-tank Demos, although valuing the power of our reflective capacity, also sees the importance of learning to use this meta-cognitive ability in the context of practical experience. Bentley (1998) suggests that:

Mental strategies are valuable in all sorts of situations, but they cannot ultimately substitute for understanding derived from experience. If we focus too hard on the strength of general principles and strategies, we soon fall down in the face of problems which demand context-specific, experiential knowledge. (p.136)

Again, this reinforces the necessary connection between experiential learning and critical reflection. It further demonstrates the need to achieve a balance between ‘reflection-on-action’ and ‘reflection-in-action’, where the emphasis is more on reflexive practice and emotional intelligence (see Goleman, 1996).

According to Schön (1987) both the processes of ‘reflection-on-action’ and ‘reflection-in-action’ are integral to the dialogue and conversation embedded in reflective practice. ‘Reflection-in-action’ focuses on the quality of listening, attention and awareness that enables processes and performance to be monitored and modified from the inside in the moment of action. “Our thinking serves to reshape what we are doing while we are doing it” (Schön, 1987, p.26). Often this knowledge cannot be put into words – it remains tacit in the form of implicit understanding. “Like knowing-in-action, reflection-in-action is a process we can deliver without being able to say what we are doing” (ibid., p.31).

Schön points out the centrality of knowing-in-action and reflection-in-action in any kind of performance and he illustrates this through examining how jazz improvisation is dependent on fostering a ‘musical conversation’.

When good jazz musicians improvise together, they […] display reflection-in-action smoothly integrated into ongoing performance. Listening to one another, listening to themselves, they ‘feel’ where the music is going and adjust their playing accordingly […] They reflect-in-action on the music they are collectively making – though not, of course, in the medium of words.

Their process resembles the familiar patterns of everyday conversation. In a good conversation […] participants pick up and develop themes of talk, each spinning out variations on her repertoire of things to say. Conversation is collective verbal improvisation […] In such examples, the participants are making something. Out of musical materials or themes of talk, they make a piece of music or a conversation, an artefact with its own meaning and coherence. Their reflection-in-action is a reflective conversation with the materials of a situation – ‘conversation’, now, in a metaphorical sense. (ibid., pp.30–31)

At the heart of reflection-in-action, then, lies the development of reflexivity and tacit knowledge. The notion of reflexivity is central to the influential work of Anthony Giddens (1984). In his analysis he suggests that:

The reflexive capacities of the human actor are characteristically involved in a continuous manner with the flow of day-to-day conduct in the context of social activity. But reflexivity operates only partly on a discursive level. What agents know about what they do, and why they do it – their knowledgeableity as agents – is largely carried in practical consciousness. Practical consciousness consists of all things which actors know tacitly about how to ‘go on’ in the contexts of social life without being able to give them direct discursive expression. (p.1)
Recognising the dynamic, reflexive nature of human action and the importance of making constant mutual connections in social interaction, Giddens emphasises three key elements:

- We can only give a partial description of our actions and social conditions in words and verbal language – i.e., discursively.
- The knowledge we hold about any particular action includes everything we know, both tacitly and explicitly, about the specific circumstances and the people involved in our actions – i.e., knowledgeability.
- We hold much of this knowledge about our actions and social conditions in our ‘practical consciousness’ and this cannot be expressed discursively.

Central to Giddens’ view of reflexivity is the pivotal position of tacit ways of knowing within the whole area of ‘practical consciousness’ (Giddens, 1984, p.1). Tacit knowledge lies at the core of human relationships and experiential learning. Like practical knowledge, it is rooted in action, and in commitment and involvement in a specific context. Although it is often embedded in collaborative work that enjoys a shared history, shared values and forms of understanding, tacit knowledge has a personal quality that makes it impossible to formalise and describe discursively.

One of the earliest exponents of tacit knowledge was the philosopher Michael Polanyi (1966) who, in his book *The Tacit Dimension*, opens his analysis of knowledge by claiming that “we can know more than we can tell (p.4)”. He highlights the point that practical knowledge relies on “the pupil’s intelligent co-operation for catching the meaning of the demonstration (p.5)” Basics, some knowledge cannot be put into words. Tacit knowledge, that is hidden or latent knowledge, is central to the whole process of coming to know experientially within any practical context. Echoing Polanyi, the creative energy or spirit embedded in tacit knowledge can only be caught and not taught.

In a study of the Guildhall *Connect* project, Renshaw (2005a) examined the place of tacit knowledge in musical leadership. The observations are applicable in any other practical context.

In effective workshop practice the leader creates space in which all the musicians become totally engaged in the spirit of the music in the moment. This is caught through the act of doing and it remains unspoken.

Although Polanyi (1996) is not writing in the context of music and the performing arts, he observes that in the area of tacit knowing “we incorporate it in our body – or extend our body to include it – so that we come to dwell in it” (p.16). Without this enriched feeling of tacit knowledge, the musician is disconnected from his or her creative source and has little to say to an audience or to fellow musicians.

Experienced music leaders are well aware that they have to create an environment that is conducive to fostering tacit forms of learning. Leading by example between people at all levels of experience becomes critical in an effective learning process. Learning will then take place through watching, listening, imitating, responding, absorbing, reflecting and connecting with that particular musical context […] It is clear that [this process] results in a strong form of knowing and understanding. (Renshaw, 2005a, pp.19–20).

The report on *Connect* demonstrates that leaders engaged in any kind of workshop practice in music, dance, theatre or visual arts, for example, attach considerable significance to fostering tacit ways of knowing. They also understand the implications of the distinction between explicit knowledge, in which targets can be measured in quantifiable, mechanistic terms, and tacit knowledge, which is more intuitive, reflexive and learned in very particular situations. Explicit knowledge can be clearly articulated, codified, quantified, replicated and transferred from one context to another. Tacit knowledge, on
the other hand, is intangible, less observable, more complex and more difficult to detach from the person who created it or from the context in which it is located. As indicated above, the subtle nuances connected to tacit knowledge are more often caught and learned through a process of apprenticeship, through conversation, and are not readily transferable (see Renshaw, 2005b, pp.111–12).

The challenge to Creative Learning is to ensure that a synergy is maintained between the distinct yet related forms of learning underpinning the wide spectrum of activities across Barbican-Guildhall. An increasing body of work has a cross-arts dimension, but all projects and programmes are rooted in creative learning, collaborative learning and experiential learning. For this work to continue to develop and remain responsive to change, it is critical that a reflective perspective is linked organically to all activities. The quality, coherence and integrity of all projects have to be informed by reflective learning. Neglecting this runs the danger of standing still and losing the cutting edge necessary for any development.

**Creative Learning in practice**

The preceding analysis demonstrates that the work and life of Creative Learning is a hub of innovation, experiment and creativity across the Barbican-Guildhall. It is seen as a buckle between both organisations and its approaches to learning are increasingly being used to develop new paradigms of arts practice. A few major initiatives will now be examined to illustrate the scope, diversity and imagination of Creative Learning and to show how the five modes of learning – creative learning, collaborative learning, cross-arts learning, experiential learning and reflective learning – lie at the core of its work. The three exemplary projects are:

- *Disruption* (October 2010 – 29 January 2011)
- *Future Band* (2008 onwards)
- *Unleashed* (January 2012 – 23/24 November 2012)

**Disruption**

*Disruption* was a cross-arts project inspired by the Barbican Art Gallery’s exhibition *Future Beauty: 30 Years of Japanese Fashion*. The curator of the event was Sean Gregory who conceived the idea as a working illustration of how a number of discrete creative organisations can work together not only to evolve a process of collaborative creativity but also a final performance of the highest standards. Gregory’s work included identifying sources of funding, and assembling – and subsequently directing – a coherent group of specialist leaders who could facilitate the process, ensuring a shared understanding of the aims of the project.

Disruption brought together 87 young people aged eight to nineteen from across East London, working alongside professional practitioners from the Barbican, Guildhall School and the London College of Fashion’s Widening Participation Unit, with the aim of developing their practical skills in the creation of fashion, music and dance pieces. Workshops began

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1 Discussion of all projects is informed by evaluation reports and documentation provided by the Barbican/Guildhall Creative Learning team.
in October 2010 and the project culminated in a spectacular public performance on 29 January 2011, showcasing the work produced by the young people on the Barbican foyers. There were several strands to the project:

- 40 young people (aged 12–19) were recruited from East London schools to work with London College of Fashion (LCF) to design garments and accessories or to learn about fashion photography and filming, in direct response to the exhibition
- 24 young musicians (aged 8–19) from Creative Learning’s existing ensemble Future Band worked together to compose a piece of music inspired by the exhibition, which was performed prior to the fashion performance
- 8 young people (aged 15–18) from Creative Learning’s World in Motion drumming group, Drum Heads, performed a drumming set moving the audience from the Future Band performance to the stage for the fashion performance
- 15 young people (aged 14–18) from Barbican Associate company Boy Blue Entertainment, learned an especially choreographed routine, which was performed whilst modelling the garments and accessories by the group working with LCF, to tracks commissioned from Guildhall alumni band, Jetsam.

The conception of the project very much resonated with where many young people are at in their perception of contemporary culture. For example, fashion is seen as a visual and creative expression of an individual’s identity, as well as being the symbolic expression of a culture at a specific time and place. Fashion also offers a unique access point for many young people into visual culture because they are already creative participants in that world. In terms of context, the East End of London is the working-base of many world-class designers and fashion professionals, some of whom have studied at London’s art schools. This provided a rich opportunity for the young people to work creatively with leading designers as mentors and role models.

With this background, the project was designed to meet four main objectives:

- To develop confidence and encourage creativity and imagination in participants working with LCF and a range of creative industry professionals, in order to build skills in the areas of fashion, film and photography
- To change the perceptions of participants working with LCF around their artistic potential, and in doing so, to raise participant aspirations around future education and career options in the fields of fashion, film and photography
- To encourage collaboration across art forms and across project partners, bringing Barbican, the Guildhall School and LCF into a working relationship that will ‘disrupt’ the creative process for participants, encouraging experimentation and allowing them to explore difference through sound, movement, clothing and culture
- To activate, in one spectacular ‘Fashion in Motion’ event, the Barbican foyers with fashion designs, photography, film, dance and music produced by participants, celebrating their creative work and achievement.

The key learning outcomes for the participants included:

- Developing new skills in fashion, photography, film, music and dance
- Creating practical work in fashion, photography, film, music and dance, for presentation at a professional level
- Learning from arts and industry professionals, including developing relevant professional vocabularies
- Engaging with groups and individuals from across the creative sector, including creative industry partners from East London through masterclasses, and participants from other artistic disciplines
• Developing group work and team leading skills through collaborative working with other participants
• Raising understanding of potential progression routes in fashion, film, photography, music and dance.

By definition, *Disruption* was an ambitious cross-arts project drawing its original inspiration from the Barbican Japanese Fashion exhibition, but then using creative collaborative processes to produce work that was either displayed or performed at the final performance. Interactive experiential learning was at the heart of the creative approaches used in the fashion, photography, film, music and dance workshops. There was an integrity and coherence between the philosophy underpinning Barbican/Guildhall Creative Learning and its practice in a major artistic and strategic project.

Although there was a reflective element in the processes used to create the work, most of the reflection took place through the evaluation and collection of evidence. The complexity of the evaluation was recognised in the evaluation report (Barbican-Guildhall, 2011):

Due to the scale of the project, its diverse strands and large number of participants, the evaluation strategy needed to be carefully considered and coordinated, and executed to a high standard. To ensure that the value and impact of the project was effectively measured, and key learning outcomes captured in order to inform similar future projects, Creative Learning consulted with SHM Foundation (a main funder) to map out the range of evaluation methods to be implemented. These needed to capture the experiences and views of each group of participants and each project partner, using a balance of quantitative and qualitative data.

The evaluation strategy included a range of forms, interviews, and evaluation meetings. Forms used collected participants’ demographic data, measured their confidence levels pre- and post-involvement in the project, and captured their feedback after the performance. A form was also used to measure the responses of school teachers and tutors after the performance. ‘The Pod’, a stationary film point which participants could use to record their verbal feedback, was set up on the day of the performance, and was available throughout the rehearsal period and after the performance so that the young people could feed back in an informal way. ‘The Pod’ was complemented by a series of semi-structured face-to-face interviews carried out after the performance with participants, conducted by SHM volunteers. Internal evaluation reports were produced by LCF and Barbican/Guildhall Creative Learning respectively and a ‘wash up’ evaluation meeting was held a fortnight after the event […] attended by all facilitators and participating organisations. (p.5)

The scope and scale of the whole project was well documented in the evaluation report and *Disruption* has become a benchmark for subsequent large-scale cross-arts events involving a range of partners and participants. The reflective component was seen as critical to informing the conception, planning, production, delivery and evaluation of any future multi-faceted project initiated by Barbican/Guildhall Creative Learning. The evaluation report concludes with the following observation:

All of the groups involved in *Disruption* reported that overall the outcome of the project – the final performance at the Barbican – was a great success. The aim of balancing an excellent, professional standard artistic product and ongoing high quality learning for all participants was achieved, and all of the project partners contributed to this outcome. *Disruption* has set the standard for new production values. The artistic outcome had integrity as a product and the voices and creativity of the young people involved were given expression. The participants gave articulate and thoughtful feedback, expressing not only their enjoyment of the project, but a recognition of their achievements, the range of skills learnt and the pathways open to them for further exploration of their creativity in the future. (ibid., p.18)
Future Band

*Future Band* has been running as a Barbican/Guildhall Creative Learning ensemble since 2008. It comprises an ensemble of young musicians (aged 8–19), mixed abilities and instruments, led by Detta Danford and Natasha Zielazinski. It works together collaboratively, using improvisation and techniques of group composition to create new music. Rather than using musical notation, it relies on aural and collective memory, and shared ensemble leadership to create and perform its works.

The origins of Future Band lie in Gregory’s search for ways in which external facilitation of creativity can nevertheless allow participants to remain in control of the creative process and its results. In this sense Gregory created Future Band as a laboratory within which the creative/collaborative process could be examined and from which transferrable models could be deduced.

Since its inception *Future Band* has been putting into practice the four key elements in Wenger’s theory of ‘learning as social participation’ mentioned earlier in this article. That is:

- Meaning through learning as experience
- Practice through learning as doing
- Community through learning as belonging
- Identity through learning as becoming (Wenger, 1998, p.5)

The creative work of *Future Band* is rooted in collaborative forms of experiential learning that generate a shared sense of belonging within different contexts. Both its inclusive and collective approach has helped to create a strong sense of identity within the group. In a recent testimony outlining the organic nature of their work, Detta Danford and Natasha Zielazinski emphasise that they always try to give the young musicians:

> space and time to establish an atmosphere of inclusiveness, openness and experimentation, which has [...] become fundamental to our way of working. Furthermore, at the core of all of the work we have led with *Future Band*, is a continuing dedication to the idea of collaboration. This is evident across the ensemble: between every participant and their relationship to the band as a whole, in the way we approach a concept or musical idea as a group, and in the way we realise those ideas as compositional structures. This has led to a strong sense of ownership by every member of the band, from participants to assistants to leaders. (Renshaw, 2011, p.117)

In terms of context, *Future Band* has worked with musicians and artists of many backgrounds, genres and cultures: for example, with jazz musicians, film makers, electronic musicians, theatre and poetry, as well as with musicians from West Africa, Palestine and Java. There is a strong collective feeling that “the process of collaborating and working together means that we are all constantly engaged and challenged to understand each other and find a common ground in which we can create something new” (ibid., p.117).

One of the strongest aspects of *Future Band* is that reflective learning lies at the core of its ways of working. Critical reflection, from the youngest musician to the most experienced professional, is embedded in its practice. By 2011 this developmental

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approach became the basis of an action research project, the results of which were presented as a performance paper, *Think, Compose, Play*, at the Reflective Conservatoire Conference, *Performing at the Heart of Knowledge*, held at the Barbican-Guildhall in March 2012.

The aim of the research was to explore the value and impact of their work and to continue developing and expanding it through more considered reflection and evaluation. It explored the processes of collaboration within *Future Band*, focusing especially on four areas:

- How the Band works together
- The impact of this work on individuals, the group and the wider community
- How the Band forms its group identity
- How the group understands and reflects on what it does together.

The research was conducted as part of the ongoing programme of *Future Band* projects and events within the period between June 2011 and June 2012. The approach to the research included the use of interviews, questionnaires and reflective diaries. This process was supported by reflective sessions and open discussions both within the Band and with a wider community of parents, colleagues and associates. The questions explored at different stages of the research were wide-ranging, with particular attention paid to the following:

- What does *Future Band* mean to you?
- How does it relate to other areas of our lives?
- How do we describe it to other people?
- What does the future hold?
- Where would we be without the Band?
- What does creativity mean to you?
- How do we create the music we make?
- Do you feel connected to the music?
- Do you think of yourself as a composer/performer/leader?
- Why do we rehearse?
- What do we think about practice?
- Does it matter to you that each person’s voice can really be heard within the Band?
- What is important in working together?
- How might we work together better?
The findings of the research included four particular areas for further thought and development:

**Collaboration and working together**
- An ongoing process of investigation, where the end destination may not be known in advance
- A willingness to explore many paths, possibilities and directions
- A commitment to co-operation and sharing based on a sense of trust and excitement about a new discovery.

**Leadership**
- Shared, flexible, dynamic and complex
- ‘Too many cooks do not spoil the broth’: everyone is a ‘cook’ or leader
- In the way we work together, leadership is inherent in participation
- Different forms of leadership may be present concurrently
- Individuals have varied roles and responsibilities and demonstrate different forms of leadership, i.e.,
  - sharing an idea with the group
  - directing a discussion about musical structure
  - conducting sectionals or the whole band in a particular passage, gesture or motif
  - guiding a process which explores a musical or conceptual idea.

**Composition**
Key points about how a composition is created were highlighted by the research process:
- We often start with a clear idea or brief
- We work together as a whole band, in smaller groups, and sometimes individually to develop ideas
- Leadership is fluid, sometimes self-organising and localised, other times clearly directed by one individual
- Any member of the Band can suggest an idea
- Experimentation and improvisation are key tools for exploring musical or conceptual material
- Ideas are developed through an ongoing process of critical reflection involving change, adaptation and revision
- Learning to listen, cultivate awareness and respond to others is necessary
- We use collective memory to remember the music and record it
- Our practice is not confined to rehearsal techniques but is an approach and model of working together to make music.
Ownership and identity

• There is a strong sense of collective ownership of the music, the practice and the Band

• Individual voices are supported and given room for expression and felt to be part of the ‘collective’ rather than the negation of it

• There is an emphasis on a shared frame of mind which encourages discussion, experimentation and a plurality of opinion, voice and point of view.

In summary, the research found that:

• The music of Future Band is new, unique, original, remembered, flexible, adaptable and complex

• The practice of Future Band is investigative, reflective, reflexive and ongoing, supported by trust, openness, acceptance, sharing and willingness

• The identity of Future Band is collective, a mindset, owned and connected.

Currently, Detta Danford and Natasha Zielazinski³ are extending their research by exploring new paradigms in collaborative practice in the context of Future Band and the New York Philharmonic (NYP), who visited the Barbican Centre in February 2012. The motivation for this research originated in the NYP’s Very Young Composers (VYC) project that ran concurrently with Future Band. The VYC programme engages young people in creative music-making by enabling them to create their own compositions for mixed ensemble, from conception to a finished score and performance. Each individual participant is supported by the leadership team who act as mentors and aids in transcribing the final scores.

Through working together and participating in each other’s projects, both teams of project leaders became interested in the following aspects of collaboration:

• Further investigating both approaches to creative music-making within participatory settings, working with young people through to graduate level assistants.

• Identifying the parallels and meeting points between the two projects as well as the differences, and further exploring these points of interest.

• Examining the impact of both projects on the participants involved and exploring the ways in which the two approaches might work together to provide a richer musical experience.

• Seeking how the leaders and facilitators can learn from these new approaches and reviewing the impact such collaboration might have on their own practice as artists, performers and leaders.

• Deepening understanding of the wider context of their work and collaboration, both within their communities in London and in New York, and within the context of the Barbican Centre and its International Associates.

³ Details of this project are taken from a research proposal outlining a current collaboration between Future Band and the New York Philharmonic’s Very Young Composers programme.
After extensive discussion between the respective leaders, the aims of the research project were finalised:

- To further investigate, understand and interrogate different models of creative music-making and participatory learning with the intention of exploring possible new paradigms in collaborative practice.
- To support discussion, reflection, collaboration and exchange between Barbican/Guildhall Creative Learning and the New York Philharmonic.
- To provide case studies and data which explore and investigate the nature of creative music-making and participatory learning.
- To compile a written report of the research as well as experiment with methods of presenting the research that will be inclusive to research participants (e.g., a pilot website with a collaborative and multi-media approach).
- To present the findings of the research at an international music education symposium hosted by the Barbican Centre and Guildhall School in conjunction with the LA Philharmonic residency at the Barbican in March 2013.

The following research questions are regarded as central to this collaborative project:

- What do we understand by ‘collaborative practice’ within the context of Barbican/Guildhall Creative Learning and the New York Philharmonic?

- What is the impact of collaborative practice in terms of the following?
  - Approach and process
  - Communication and leadership
  - Compositional processes
  - Shared responsibility
  - The role of the individual and the collective
  - Identity and ownership

- From what perspectives might we examine the potential emergence of a new paradigm in collaborative practice?
  - Approaches to creative music-making
  - Traditions of aural and notated music
  - The voice of the composer, as an individual and within a group
  - The role of leadership, facilitation and mentoring
  - The relationship between music and the composer/creator

One of the strengths of *Future Band* is that its whole approach is developmental and all aspects of its practice are underpinned by critical reflection. It has become an exemplary model of experientially-based, creative collaborative learning, and as such it acts as a seedbed for action research.
**Unleashed**

*Unleashed* was an ambitious multi-layered cross-arts project mounted by the Barbican in association with Boy Blue Entertainment. The directors of the creative team began their thinking and planning in January 2012 and the project culminated in three performances in the Barbican in November 2012.

Gregory conceived *Unleashed* in collaboration with its joint leader, the Director of Arts of the Barbican, Louise Jeffreys. He oversaw the project’s trajectory that moved from initial workshop and laboratory investigation to rehearsals, a production period and finally the performance. Throughout this process one of Gregory’s main concerns was to ensure that the participants remained the owners of the event and that its collaborative methodology resisted the more directed approach commonly seen in the latter stages of rehearsal periods.

The aim of the project was to support the development of young people’s skills in various art forms in a creative way resulting in a production that was marked by the quality of both the process and the final outcome. It was intended to raise the young people’s awareness of what the possibilities of the arts can be, and develop the work of the Barbican artistic associates Boy Blue Entertainment.

Barbican/Guildhall Creative Learning runs five ensembles in thirteen groups, involving a total of 552 participants. All of these ensembles were invited to take part in *Unleashed*, a public, professional, cross-arts theatre production on the Barbican Theatre stage which was conceived, developed and made by young people. It involved 128 young ensemble members from Creative Learning along with 24 dancers from the youth arm of London hip hop dance company Boy Blue Entertainment, making a total of 152 participant performers. *Unleashed* was supported by a Creative Team of 40, which included 15 professional artist leaders and five students from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, who worked directly with the ensembles. Three performances took place in the Barbican Theatre over 23rd and 24th November with a total audience of 2217.

The ensembles/groups involved in the project included:

- *Da Bratz* and *Da Bluez* are the two youth groups run by major UK street dance company Boy Blue Entertainment.
- *Future Band* (discussed earlier)
- Barbican Young Poets offers 20 budding young writers aged 14–24 the chance to create, craft and perform poetry and spoken word in a group setting.
- Young Filmmakers are a new group aged 15–25 with an interest in making films that draw on the Barbican as a place, the people who pass through it and the artistic programme.
- *World in Motion Drumming* is a large-scale Barbican/Guildhall Creative Learning collaboration which gives young people from across the Olympic and City fringe boroughs the chance to develop their artistic and performance skills.
- *Drumheads* are formed by young Londoners selected from *World in Motion Drumming* groups in participating East London schools. Drawing from global influences, the explosive *Drumhead* percussion group beat out the rhythms of the world in exhilarating style.
The production of *Unleashed* provided a catalyst to undertake research with the participants of all of the ensembles that took part, including both those that were part of the production and those that were not. Feedback was collected from the *Unleashed* participants via a survey. Focus group interviews were held with each ensemble, bringing together those that took part in *Unleashed* and those that did not. Additionally, a feedback discussion was held with the Creative Team of *Unleashed*, the artist leaders of each ensemble completed a feedback survey, and the audience of *Unleashed* was invited to feedback via a face-to-face survey.

### Key Findings

76% of participants responding to our survey definitely or probably agreed that they had learnt new skills through participating in *Unleashed*, whilst 98% felt that it had helped them to develop their existing skills. 73% of respondents agreed they had developed life skills (e.g. teamwork, leadership, communication) through taking part, exceeding our target of 60%. One participant drew on their experience of “drumming while there’s someone dancing to your beat” to highlight how they had learnt teamwork through the creative process. Another participant, who was home-schooled, commented on how *Unleashed* provided her with the opportunity to learn “how to work with groups, listen to other people’s ideas, and take them in, and incorporate them”.

Many participants said the production provided them with an opportunity to ‘voice’ their opinions in a safe environment and that there was a real sense of ownership of both the thematic and artistic content. A recurring discussion theme was that *Unleashed* provided an environment conducive to safe experimentation, mistakes and discovery of participants’ own artistic voices, which some believed differed from artistic education within schools. As one drummer described, “when we do it here [at school], they have the beats and we just learn them. On that [Unleashed], we had to come up with the beats and teach everyone how to play them ourselves”.

Our research found that participants took part for a variety of reasons, including developing artistic skills, valuing the collaborative working process of ensembles, developing friendships and the transferable skills gained.

Participants placed significant emphasis on their enjoyment of working across art forms and with a focus on process-based skills, though they also value working towards a performance outcome. Participants value artist leaders with a style which is inclusive, collaborative and not directorial, and an atmosphere that is open to collaboration and risk-taking.

A number of participants commented on the development of artistic skills gained, and how the ensemble approach differs from school-based learning. Participants value a feeling of ownership over the work created through ensembles, both in terms of artistic material and thematic content. Those that took part in *Unleashed* also raised that they valued the opportunity to talk and be asked how they felt about issues that affect them as young people, such as the London riots.

In terms of inclusion and access, participants identified that the time commitment involved in *Unleashed* was off-putting to some ensemble members. Those that did take part felt that the project encouraged young people from family backgrounds which might not support arts activities to take part.
Lessons for Developing Practice in Participatory Settings

*Unleashed* has demonstrated that collaborative, dialogue-based arts activities engender a very real sense of ownership and pride amongst participants, over the artistic and thematic content. Important to this research is that it achieved this alongside high production values and artistic excellence. There are some core areas for further research:

- There is a greater need for artist understanding of the conceptual, ethical and contextual issues which underpin work in participatory settings.
- The high emphasis and value placed on artistic skills of artists, facilitators and leaders amongst participants, indicate that it is essential that artistic skills must be at the centre of participatory training models.
- Participants value artist leaders with a friendly, collaborative and not directorial approach to work.
- Participants highly value an ‘expert’ artist leader; someone with a wealth of artistic experience.

There is a divergence in perception between participants and artist leaders about the success of the process. During discussions artist leaders talked about the difficulty of “finding a balance between sensitivities and delivering a result”. Participants did not pick up on this point to the same extent that the artist leaders did.

**Conclusion**

It is hoped that these three major projects – *Disruption, Future Band* and *Unleashed* – illustrate the innovative potential of artists from different disciplines using experientially-based modes of creative learning that are embedded in a philosophy of reflective, collaborative practice. But although these examples exemplify the rich culture of Creative Learning, the models of learning being developed are also informed by many other important initiatives across Barbican-Guildhall.

In conclusion, one further example will be taken to illustrate the cutting edge nature of Creative Learning. From April 2011 to March 2014 Barbican-Guildhall are developing a new radical programme of creative learning and artistic enquiry as part of a Special Initiative, ‘ArtWorks: Developing Practice in Participatory Settings’, set up by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation (2011). The objectives of the national programme are:

- To develop, pilot and embed training and continuous professional development methods for artists working in participatory settings at all stages of their careers
- To develop a better understanding of what constitutes quality in participatory work through sharing good practice across art forms and demonstrating positive outcomes
- To gather, document and disseminate compelling evidence of positive impact. (Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2011)

At the heart of this initiative is the development and support of ‘pathfinder partnerships’:

ArtWorks will support ‘pathfinder partnerships’ – cross-artform collaborations between organisations based in different regions of the UK. Through action-based research each seeks to raise the standard of arts-led experience by improving the quality and understanding of what is required from artists in participatory projects, sharing good practice and demonstrating positive outcomes. (ibid.)
The lead partners of ArtWorks London are the Barbican and the Guildhall School and they have generated a number of imaginative projects that have brought together Barbican and Guildhall staff with artists working in participatory settings.

One of its first projects, **Connecting Conversations**, consisted of a series of facilitated discussions exploring key issues confronting artists from different art forms and stages of their careers. The project was also designed to test the model as a support framework for reflective practice. The emergent themes and issues arising from the 16 **Connecting Conversations** sessions were analysed qualitatively using data coding software (Barbican-Guildhall, 2012b, p.2). They divided into six main categories:

- Personal and professional learning, development and support
- Artistic learning, development and support
- Participation
- Collaboration
- Organisations
- Language

In order to explore the potential and relevance of **Connecting Conversations** as a support framework for artists working in participatory settings, a logic model was developed to uncover the assumptions underlying the project.4

In the Evaluation several key observations were made regarding future proposed **Connecting Conversations**:

- **Connecting Conversations** is an appropriate support framework for the majority of artists
- Cross-arts, cross-career stage discussions are helpful in revealing differences in practice and sharing similarities in values
- Relaxed discussions over food achieves the intended outcome of open and honest discussion
- Slightly smaller groups would work better
- Future **Connecting Conversations** discussions should include people from outside the arts
- **Connecting Conversations** is only the start of building a community of practice for artists working in participatory settings
- **Connecting Conversations** needs to clarify its primary purpose and become a support framework for reflective practice. (ibid., p.3)

During the pilot year of ArtWorks London, partly as a result of **Connecting Conversations**, Barbican/Guildhall Creative Learning has diversified and reviewed its Lab model of professional development. It has enabled Creative Learning not only to expand its existing programme to reach a greater range of artists, but also to test new models, explore their relevance for artists working in participatory settings and consider ways in which Labs can constitute part of a workforce development programme at all levels of formal and informal training. In this context Lab is taken to mean “artists working

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together in a creative environment that is intended to be conducive to collaborative learning. [Labs] take place intensively over a short period to support artists to share, explore and develop their practice” (Barbican-Guildhall, 2012b, p.2). Five types of Lab were developed during the pilot year:

- Pit Lab – Open Call
- Facilitated Exploratory Lab
- Weekend Lab
- Lab leading to performance
- Continuing Professional Development Workshops (ibid., p.4)

In the evaluation of the Labs it is pointed out that further testing of the model and research around assumptions is required. The following assumptions have already been identified for examination:

- Labs offer an environment for exchange of skills, ideas and practice across art forms
- The Lab model is useful for the artist at different stages of their careers as well as within formal training at Undergraduate and Postgraduate level
- Labs provide a useful format for commissioning and producing new work for artists to take out into participatory settings.

As part of the ongoing research around Labs, it is intended that there will be a particular focus on the impact on the quality of participant experience as a result of artists taking part in Labs (ibid., p.16).

Finally, in July 2012 Creative Learning launched its first two-week summer school. This Arts School Lab was designed to extend and deepen the kind of experiences gained from previous shorter-term Labs. The format and content were shaped by the key findings of Connecting Conversations, particularly the common response from artists consulted that they lacked time and space to work and think together in order to share and develop the skills necessary to lead work in participatory settings.

Arts School Lab aimed to explore creative arts collaborations centred on social change through discussion, practical work and asserting manifestos for change today. It was grounded in a narrative of radical arts education by drawing on the principles of the influential Bauhaus School and further informed by the contemporaneous exhibition in the Barbican Art Gallery. Taking place at the Barbican and the Bauhaus Foundation, Dessau, Arts School Lab examined the Bauhaus’s big arts education ambitions around the artist’s relationship to society, but bringing it up to the present day.

Arts School Lab was designed to interrogate the impact that the intensive Lab environment has on the practice and development of the artists attending. There was a particular focus on exploring the extent to which the Lab develops the skills, roles and values of artists working in participatory settings. The core action research question underpinning the

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6 Full details of Arts School Lab 2012 can be found in the Evaluation Report (Barbican-Guildhall, 2012c).
Creative Learning across the Barbican-Guildhall Campus: A new paradigm for engaging with the arts?

The project was ‘how does the laboratory environment impact on the practice of artists working in participatory settings?’ Three key areas of impact were identified:

- The collaborative, immersive laboratory environment
- The basis of an historical starting point – the Bauhaus
- Innovation that emerges at the intersection of the arts and learning, drawing on both previous areas. (Barbican-Guildhall, 2012c, p.6)

There are intended to be three areas of legacy work from Arts School Lab. These are:

- The creation of a pamphlet publication that will draw together the manifestos created by members of the Lab
- Using the learning and research from this pilot to help guide the development of a second summer school in 2013 and to embed it within future ArtWorks London projects
- The potential for Lab members to further develop their work with Creative Learning through opportunities such as Exploratory Labs. A budget was allocated to post-project mentoring with tutors and advisors, and to potential project commissions that could come out of Arts School Lab. (ibid., p.6)

In the Evaluation Report Arts School Lab was seen as “an effective learning environment for mid-career artists – the career stage at which Connecting Conversations indicated a gap in the support framework currently available – and therefore there is a strong imperative to continue developing the summer school concept” (ibid., p.4). In its conclusions the report states that:

As the summer school model is further tested in different contexts through the next two years of ArtWorks London, we will also develop a dissemination strategy to share the learning that underpins the development of the model and ensure that it is translatable through our network of partners and beyond.

Our next steps through Artworks London are to:

- Continue to track artists beyond the summer school
- Investigate the impact on the quality of participant experience as a result of artists taking part in summer schools
- Open out the summer school model to the ArtWorks London Network. (ibid., p.4)

Critically – and particularly as a result of its work through the Paul Hamlyn Foundation ArtWorks Special Initiative – Barbican/Guildhall Creative Learning is developing and consolidating a coherent, flexible and sustainable professional development framework for the 21st century artist, with the following values at its heart:

- **Artists as entrepreneurs:** leading in the development of their own pathways through a dynamic personalised learning framework where the resources follow the learner
- **Artists who raise expectations:** bringing greater focus and a more consistent, higher level of quality to process and output in participatory settings
- **Artists who have critical capacity:** capable of recognising challenges and of applying critical capabilities constructively to both their own work and the work of others
• **Artists as part of a community of practitioners**: committed to strengthening their sector through developing practice and joining up provision in participatory settings

• **Artists who are curious**: keen to share and learn from new ideas, knowledge, skills, views and practice

• **Artists who are focused**: capable of maintaining an intense, regular and highly energised work pattern

• **Artists who are self-aware**: able to support themselves through reflective practice, and to make realistic, informed choices and decisions in complex and unpredictable situations

• **Artists as ambassadors**: who promote the role and contribution of the arts to its function in society with integrity and attention to its ethical values.

What is clear from this analysis of the multi-faceted work of Barbican/Guildhall Creative Learning is that it is strongly committed to extending and deepening its approaches to learning, at the same time as developing new paradigms of arts practice. The increasingly organic link between ‘learning and engagement’ and the artistic programme is acting as a catalyst for new forms of performance, participation and audience development. Innovation, experiment and creativity are the norm – nothing stands still – and as has been demonstrated, the core of the work is underpinned by five key modes of learning. Practitioners are creative in their approaches to their thinking and actions; they have the confidence and imagination to confront the challenges of working together; they are adventurous in working across art forms; they are committed to the idea that learning is best acquired through direct individual and collective experience; and there is growing respect for the notion that artistic practice, and personal and professional development have to be underpinned by critical reflection. This is a challenging scenario but it is the motor that is driving all development forwards.
Bibliography


